

# JAPANESE WOODBLOCK PRINTS

from the  
Sweet Briar  
Collection



The exhibition,  
*Japanese Woodblock Prints*  
*from the Sweet Briar Collection,*  
is the first in a series of interdisciplinary  
events scheduled during the Festival  
of Japan at Sweet Briar College,  
February 15 - April 14, 1989.

Cover: Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Beauty with a Letter/Jurojin with the Deer*,  
ca. 1848, woodblock print, 14 5/8" x 10 1/8",  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Henningsen, Jr.



# JAPANESE WOODBLOCK PRINTS

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Japanese Woodblock Prints from the Sweet Briar Collection

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Sweet Briar College  
Anne Gary Pannell Center  
Sweet Briar, Virginia  
February 15 - April 14, 1989

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# Acknowledgments

The substantial holdings of Japanese woodblock prints in the Sweet Briar Collection are the result of the generosity of Ruth Woodhull Smith, Dr. Carol Rice, and Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Henningsen, Jr. Their gifts, totaling more than one hundred prints, prompted the idea of an exhibition to display an array of the best. The selection, ranging in dates from 1740 to 1880, was made by Mr. Terukata Fujieda, Professor of Art History at Musashino Art University in Tokyo, who served as Visiting Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at Sweet Briar College. The students in his Oriental Art History class individually researched and wrote the catalogue entries. We are most grateful for Mr. Fujieda's many contributions to this exhibition and the preparation of the accompanying catalogue. Mrs. Yoko Matsumoto, Mr. Seiji Nagata, and Mr. Takahiro Ueda provided invaluable assistance in the identification of authorship and textual interpretation of the woodblock prints.

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Carma C. Fauntleroy  
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# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Edo period in Japanese history opened in 1615 with the establishment of the shogunate of Ieyasu Tokugawa and the relocation of the capital from the imperial city of Kyoto to Edo (modern Tokyo). During the Middle Ages, the contending *daimyo*, or lords of the provincial armies of *samurai*, ravaged the countryside with military skirmishes. The Tokugawa shogunate effectively gained control over the *daimyo* and the subsequent centralization of power ushered in 250 years of peace, which fostered economic stabilization and prosperity. In the absence of war, the role of the *daimyo* changed. Required by the *shōgun* to reside every other year in Edo, the feudal lords were transformed into government administrators and patrons of the arts.

Commercial ventures thrived in Edo, where successful merchants and artisans constituted a new and rising social class of urban bourgeoisie. As the townsmen prospered, they too had the leisure and means to enjoy the pleasures of the city: courtesans of the Yoshiwara district, the melodramas of *Kabuki* theatres, teahouses, public baths, and works of art depicting these delights. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the term *ukiyo* was associated with the Yoshiwara and its amusements.

*Ukiyo*, literally “floating world,” was originally a Buddhist concept referring to the transitory, illusory quality of secular life, through which one could discover the essence, or spiritual reality, of existence. Closely related to *ukiyo* was *mūjo*, which suggests an ever-changing existence that is full of uncertainty. In medieval times, the meaning of *ukiyo* carried with it the connotation of a sad and lamentable world. This interpretation was especially relevant in the sixteenth century, when life was chaotic as a result of a series of civil wars.

After peace was restored during the Momoyama period (1573-1615) by Nobunaga Oda and his general, Hideyoshi Toyotomi, and reaffirmed by the Tokugawa shogunate, the economic situation improved for the people of Japan. The transience of life as expressed

by *ukiyo* assumed a different connotation by the year 1700. Its meaning expanded to include the temporal pleasures to be found in the red-light district of Edo, the Yoshiwara. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it also suggested the modern and fashionable. The most sought after courtesans donned stylish and expensive clothing and accoutrements. Whatever its context, the concept of *ukiyo* encompasses the fleeting, insubstantial nature of time and life.

The paintings, book illustrations, and color woodblock prints which depicted the Yoshiwara quarter and its culture during the Edo period are called *Ukiyo-e*. The suffix *e*, meaning “pictures,” was added in the 1680s. The most common subjects of this art were courtesans and their lovers, actors of the *Kabuki* stage, and daily life in the city and countryside. Since multiple woodblock prints could be produced quickly and inexpensively, they were distributed widely. Prints served as souvenirs for visitors returning from the pleasures of the city. A print might carry the address of the teahouse depicted thereon and serve as a form of advertising. For a devoted fan of a famous actor, his printed portrait would be a fond reminder of a great performance. Color woodblock prints were also exported to European collectors of exotica from the Far East and to nineteenth-century French artists, who were fascinated by the works of their Japanese counterparts.

The history of *Ukiyo-e* woodblock prints begins with a group of *yamato-eshi* (Japanese-style painters). These pioneers in the woodblock medium established the native Japanese characteristics of the *Ukiyo-e* style. Evident in works by artists in the second phase of *Ukiyo-e* is the influence of Western art and a tendency toward realism. The final phase was one of decadence and a decline in the quality of the *Ukiyo-e* print. The masters of black-ink, single-color, and early polychrome prints comprise the first period in the history of *Ukiyo-e* prints. These artists of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries portrayed the world around them, as had art-

ists of *Yamato-e* (Japanese-style pictures) during the Heian period (794-1185). The father of the *Ukiyo-e* print, Hishikawa Moronobu (1618-1694), even signed his name with the characters *yamato-eshi* (Japanese-style painter).

In the mid-ninth century, many Heian painters consciously diverged from the Chinese tradition in the visual arts. The most frequent subjects of *Kara-e*, or Chinese-style painting, were ancient Chinese legends and imaginary landscapes of high, craggy mountains and deep ravines, which might serve as the distant setting for a solitary monk in meditation. In contrast, *Yamato-eshi*, or Japanese-style painters, depicted the softly rolling hills of Japan filled with palpable vegetation. These landscape compositions were often peopled with figures performing the tasks of daily life or acting out a traditional Japanese tale. *Yamato-e* followed closely the theme of the poetry, which appeared on the same paper or silk as the painting itself. Text and image often described the seasons and man's intimate relationship to cyclical, ever-changing nature.

*Yamato-e* first decorated the sliding doors and folding screens used in feudal castles during the late ninth and tenth centuries. Another source for our knowledge of a national painting style is *e-maki* (handscroll paintings) of the twelfth century and, in particular, illustrations for "The Tale of Genji," a celebrated love story written by a woman attendant in the empress' entourage, Murasaki-shikibu. These illustrations reveal high, oblique viewpoints of the characters in action. Reverse perspective, in which parallel lines diverge with recession in space, is used extensively. Both viewpoint and perspective enhance the strong diagonal elements of the compositions. Distinctive black outlines are filled with opaque, unmodulated color. These stylistic characteristics and the native subject matter of traditional *Yamato-e* were transmitted indelibly to the *Ukiyo-e* print by woodblock artists of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Among them were Moronobu, Torii Kiyonobu (1664-1729), Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792), and Ishikawa Toyonobu (1711-1785).

As early as the eighth century, the woodcut medium was employed in Japan by Buddhist

scholars for disseminating religious teachings and sacred images. The rise of the middle class by the early seventeenth century was accompanied by an increase in literacy and a growing market for popular texts. Woodblock relief printing offered an effective way to meet the demand for illustrated texts, including ballads, serial stories, anecdotes about famous actors and courtesans, and itineraries along major routes of travel. Since calligraphy had traditionally been considered a higher form of art than painting, the text in these books was more important than the illustrations.

However, Moronobu's pictorial effects so delighted readers that the impact of the image dominated that of the text. Eventually, the printed image came to be viewed as a work of art in its own right, and these early independent prints were termed *sumizuri-e* (black-ink pictures).

The progressive use of color in woodblock prints began with the hand-coloring of black-and-white images. In the early 1700s, a single orange-red color, *tan* (red lead), was applied with a brush to certain areas of the printed black outlines. Around 1715 a rose-pink color, *beni*, replaced *tan* as the predominant color with sparse additions of yellow, blue, and green. Although prints were originally colored by hand, it soon became apparent that production could be appreciably faster if this color were also applied to the woodblock and printed. Beginning in the late 1740s, such prints, or *benizuri-e*, were limited to a few colors in a simple design.

The techniques for the polychrome prints, so popular in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were developed at the instigation of a sophisticated elite in Edo. These dilettantes amused themselves by designing elaborate pages for calendars. In 1765 they commissioned the artist Sukuzi Harunobu (1725-1770) to replicate the originals in the woodcut medium for distribution to their friends as New Year's gifts. To maximize profit, commercial publishers of the time were using thin paper and inexpensive pigments for print editions, but Harunobu's clients were willing and able to pay for a high-quality product. Using luxurious colors, superior cherry wood,



and a heavier grade paper to withstand repeated impressions, Harunobu perfected the technique for *nishiki-e*, literally “brocade pictures,” utilizing up to ten different color blocks. This multi-block method was quickly adopted by *Ukiyo-e* printmakers.

By the last decade of the eighteenth century, the golden age of the *Ukiyo-e* print was achieved by artists such as Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806) and Torii Kiyonaga (1752-1815). Technical mastery of the woodblock medium had been achieved by artists, carvers, and printers and many woodblock artists were exploring new stylistic means and subject matter. Of special note is their serious attention to realistic Western perspective as observed in Dutch copperplate etchings. In contrast to the reverse perspective of *Yamato-e*, Renaissance methods simulated nature as the eye would see it. On the flat plane of the picture surface, parallel lines converge as objects appear to recede into the distance. Japanese artists practiced copying and adapting Western perspective devices and among those who successfully incorporated them into the woodblock medium were Kiyonaga, Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), and Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). It is no wonder that the works by Japanese artists influenced by European art were those preferred by French Impressionists.<sup>2</sup>

Both Hokusai and Hiroshige concentrated on the landscape and celebrated sites of Japan. Often produced in sets as a travelogue, these images proved immensely popular at home and abroad. The popularity of *fukeiga*, or landscape prints, has been attributed to many factors. The government bans on certain subject matter stemmed production of one of the major themes in *Ukiyo-e*, erotic scenes of the Yoshiwara. In 1790, the shogunate instituted the first in a series of measures severely restricting the types of prints that could be published. Licentious subject matter was outlawed, as were deluxe editions made with luxuriant colors and costly papers. Eventually all prints had to be approved by a censor appointed by the government.

Another reason for the growing demand for *fukeiga* has been ascribed to the *shōgun*’s restrictions on travel.<sup>3</sup> Representations of views along the Tōkaidō road that ran between the imperial palace in Kyoto and the shogunate capital

of Edo may have been especially appealing to those unable to travel and see the countryside for themselves. Finally, landscape views and renderings of famous architectural monuments provided an apt vehicle by which *Ukiyo-e* artists could explore their interest in Western perspective.

*Ukiyo-e* prints of the last decades of the Edo period, which ended in 1868 with the restoration of imperial power and the Meiji government, reveal a decline in standards of quality, the so-called “decadence.” Works by artists such as Keisai Eisen (1790-1848), Hiroshige III (1843-1894), and Toyokuni III (1786-1864) lack the charm and elegance of works by the preceding generation of masters. Proportions of the figures were less elongated and appeared less graceful. Facial expressions became coarse, with exaggerated features and make-up. The quality of workmanship and materials suffered with increasingly large editions.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this decline in the traditional standards of quality was an unsuccessful attempt to prolong or recapture the spirit of a fashionable, bygone age. Government restrictions in the first half of the nineteenth century served to stymie artistic freedom and creativity, and eventually the market for *Ukiyo-e* prints experienced increasing competition from the introduction of photographs and lithographs.<sup>4</sup> Most significantly, the demise of the *Ukiyo-e* woodblock print may be attributed to the impending modernization of Japan and the subsequent preoccupation of its government, businessmen, and artists with the ways of the West.

Carma C. Fauntleroy  
Director of College Galleries

<sup>1</sup>The assistance of Terukata Fujieda, Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at Sweet Briar College, in the preparation of this essay is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup>Needham, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup>Takahashi, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>5</sup>Akiyama, p. 179.

# Ukiyo-e Woodblock Technique

The attribution of a *Ukiyo-e* woodblock print to an individual artist such as Hiroshige presumes an understanding of the printmaking process in Japan during the Edo period. Hiroshige was in fact only one of four essential participants in the creation of a masterful print. Although he designed the original composition and determined its coloration, the production of the final print also required the expertise of the publisher, the woodcutter, and the printer. It was the artist, however, that ultimately received credit for the piece.

The publisher coordinated the efforts of the artist, the master carver, and the printer's shop and ultimately determined the distribution channels for the sale of prints through wholesalers and retailers. The publisher initiated the process by engaging an artist to design a print, or series of prints. The artist may have studied traditional styles of painting, such as that of the Kanō school officially recognized by the *shōgun*, or, he may have trained in the workshop and style of another *Ukiyo-e* master. Many woodblock artists were commissioned to create original compositions to decorate household interiors or design personalized *surimono* (small private editions of greeting cards) for upper-class clients, who could afford the luxury of one-of-a-kind works of art. However, the popularity of woodblock prints with a broad middle-class market of tradesmen made this category of work lucrative for any painter. Woodblock design was a ready source of supplemental income.

Once the artist had prepared the drawing, or *hanshita-e*, the exact size of the print to be published, he traced the outlines of the drawing on a sheet of thin paper in black ink. This traced version was conveyed to the master woodcutter, who proceeded to translate the artist's brushed composition into a panel of wood, known as the key block, with knives, chisels, and scrapers. Cherry or other very hard, fine-textured wood was used to assure that even the most intricate parts of the design carved in relief would endure the pressure of literally hundreds of printings. The master cutter placed the tracing face down on

the wooden panel and carved away from the surface all wood except that indicating the outlines of the artist's drawing. Because a design carved in relief will produce a reverse image when printed, the tracing was reversed so that the final image would be oriented in the same direction as the artist's original conception. Beyond the edge of the composition in the lower right-hand margin of the panel, a small registration mark, or *kentō*, was carved. It consisted of an small right-angled mark with a second horizontal mark just to the left and in line with the lower arm of the angle.

The key block was sent to the printer, who made several black-and-white impressions, roughly the number of colors to be used in the final print. The pressure required for woodblock impressions was not provided by a mechanical press familiar to Europeans, but rather by the printer's physical strength applied to the *baren*, paper, and woodblock. The *baren*, a hard shield-like implement, was made of layers of paper pasted together, turned up around the edge to form a shallow disk, and covered with cotton cloth. A second disk of coiled, twisted cord was fitted into the paper shield, providing a rigid surface for rubbing across the paper laid on the inked woodblock. The outer covering of the *baren* was made of ribbed leaves of bamboo stretched tightly over the convex surface of the disk and twisted together at the back to form a handle. Grasping the *baren* by the handle, the printer leaned forward using the weight of his upper body to apply pressure through the *baren* as it moved in circular patterns across the paper and carved woodblock.

The proofs were sent back to the artist, who inspected the impression and indicated colors to be used for respective areas of the outline. The proofs were returned to the woodcutting shop, where the master then delegated to his assistants the carving of a separate block for each color. Full-color prints, or *nishiki-e*, could entail up to ten color blocks. Each color block included the *kentō* mark, to be used during printing to insure the proper alignment of the key and color blocks. Once the carving was

complete, the key and color blocks were turned over to the printer.

After the first color was printed, the paper was placed on top of a second block inked with a different color, and the process continued through the series of color blocks. Careful attention was paid to the precise alignment of *kentō* marks. The paper used for printing was sized with animal glue and kept damp throughout the process of printing consecutive blocks. It was important that a uniform level of dampness be maintained to prevent shrinkage or expansion of the paper, which would make accurate registration of colors impossible.

Painting, woodcutting, and printing were trades at which young men, and occasionally women, apprenticed. Ten years was the average apprenticeship for a wood carver. The division of labor within a shop was determined by the degree of skill the task required. For example, the master woodcutter might cut the most delicate areas of the all important key block. The color blocks would be delegated to his assistants according to their abilities and the difficulty of the carving. In the print shop, the tasks of an apprentice included mixing pigments, cleaning brushes, and sizing the paper.

The signature used by an artist often reflected the name of the master painter under whom he studied. Once he acquired the status of professional artist, characters from the master's signature were assumed by a student. For example, Toyokuni's pupils, Kunisada and Kuniyoshi, used a character of the name of their master for their own signatures. A favorite student might, upon the death of his teacher, assume the full name of his master; hence, artists bore names such as Hiroshige II and Toyokuni III. Artistic styles were named after especially influential masters and thereby were founded the Kanō, Maruyama, and Utagawa schools. Repeating the character or the entire name of the master vouched for the quality of training received by the artist.

As a result of the collaboration among the shops of painters, woodcutters, and printers, thousands upon thousands of *Ukiyo-e* prints

were produced in Japan during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Distribution of woodblock prints was carried out by guilds of publishers and dealers through a vast network of wholesalers, retailers, and street peddlers. European markets were supplied by export through trading ports such as Nagasaki. The importance of the publisher's role was demonstrated by the appearance of his seal on the print itself. After 1790, this seal was accompanied by that of a censor as a result of the shogunate's regulations banning erotic subjects and the representations of public officials in *Ukiyo-e* prints. At first, representatives of groups of publishers acted as censors; later the job was assigned to a government official.

The efficiency of the four-part process involving publisher, artist, woodcutter, and printer is evidenced by the sheer quantity of *Ukiyo-e* woodblock prints which inundated the native market of affluent merchants and townsmen as well as international collectors of Orientalia. How fortunate that these nineteenth-century collectors were sensitive to the beauty and charm of this "bourgeois" art form and initiated an appreciation that continues to this day. Thus, numerous *Ukiyo-e* woodblock prints have been preserved and offer telling visions of an era passed.

C.C.F.



**Ishikawa Toyonobu (1711-1785)**

Title unknown

(Crescent Moon)

Circa 1741-1764

Color woodblock print

15 1/8" x 6 7/8"

SBC# 1970.001

Gift of Ruth Woodhull Smith

Ishikawa Toyonobu is best known for his pillar prints of long narrow format and for erotic representations in the *beni* and *benizuri-e* techniques. Some are considered masterpieces of the mid-eighteenth century. During the

peak of his career, Toyonobu was considered a major arbiter of what was and was not beautiful and fashionable for women.

The untitled Sweet Briar print referred to as **Crescent Moon** probably dates to the late 1740s or 1750s. Toyonobu's earliest known prints date from the 1740s, and since this is not one of his finest pieces, it is likely that it is an early work. It is of the Edo period and *Ukiyo-e* style, the term used to describe the carefree ways of living that centered around a variety of pleasures and amusements, often with erotic overtones. It is therefore understandable that examples of this style usually depict actors, courtesans, and genre scenes of daily life.

It is difficult to determine which of these subjects this Toyonobu print depicts. Two female figures, one young and one older, are represented. Portrayed in simple dress, "un-made" faces, and casual pose, they do not appear to be actresses. It is questionable whether they are courtesans or ordinary women. Nevertheless, the women are beautiful and current in their fashion, and for this reason, the print is described as *bijin-e* or "beautiful woman picture." In *Ukiyo-e* prints, female figures were more popular than male representations. It was even more typical to represent a woman by herself.

The colors that we see in the Sweet Briar print are somewhat faded, but we can tell that the hues were limited to red (*beni*) and green (*ichiban rokushō*). Prints incorporating these colors alone are referred to as *benizuri-e*, or "pink-printed pictures." Sometimes the green is omitted, and blue and yellow are used instead. Toyonobu makes use of a heavy black outline to define his figures, as opposed to relying on very strong designs or patterns. The lack of definition of the space surrounding the figures is characteristic of Toyonobu's compositions. The fact that there is no background allows for greater concentration on the figures themselves.

In **Crescent Moon**, Toyonobu depicts the women in travel attire with wide sturdy hats and a parasol. The characters written along the right edge of the print are translated: shadow of the crescent moon is the shape of a *sugegasa* (the wide-brimmed hat, which the standing woman wears); that of the full moon is the shape of a *kasa* (umbrella or parasol like the one she holds). The character *suge* also refers to the thong of the shoe, which is being repaired by the younger woman. Thus, the older woman's accessories are reminiscent of the different phases of the moon. This is an example of the fondness the Japanese have for making puns and word associations in the titles of works of art. It reflects a duality of meaning. It is also a reminder of their love of nature and their interest in the unchanging, natural laws of the universe.

E.L.S.

**Katsukawa Shunchō** (active 1780-1795)

*Shinobazu, Edo Hakkai*

*Shinobazu Pond*, from the series, *Eight Views of Edo*  
Circa 1780-1795

Color woodblock print

9" x 7 1/4"

SBC# 1970.019

Gift of Ruth Woodhull Smith

Katsukawa Shunchō began his career under the influence of Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792). At first, Shunchō, like Shunshō, created portraits of actors from the popular *Kabuki* theater. Shunchō was influenced dramatically by the work of Torii Kiyonaga (1752-1815), who also influenced the French artist Degas. Kiyonaga is known for creating scenes of ideally beautiful women in serene settings. He tried to recapture the elegance of the courtesans depicted in early *Ukiyo-e* prints like those of the founder of the Torii school, Kiyonobu (1664-1729).

*Shinobazu Pond*, from the series *Eight Views of Edo*, was created after Shunchō adopted Kiyonaga's style. Although the influence of his teachers was great and despite his lack of originality, he at times was able to create works that surpassed those of his teachers.<sup>1</sup> The graceful figures are depicted in a series of flowing lines particularly evident in the drapery of the central figure. The figures are elongated, adding to their grace and elegance. The fragility of his figures is a quality that replaced the robust, vigorous figures of early *Ukiyo-e* art in the mid-eighteenth century.

Shunshō's influence remains in the strong diagonal arrangement of the figures and the background. The diagonals add movement to the calm scene. The compositional technique of using three main figures is a favorite of *Ukiyo-e* artists. Shunchō added the small child on the mother's back. The baby serves two purposes: first, it provides a logical reason for the woman to bend over, thus maintaining the diagonal. Second, the baby's outstretched hand visually links the standing child to the composition. The glances of the two women are paralleled by the glances of the two children, which allows the group to function as a compositional whole.

The setting for this scene is Ueno Park in downtown Edo, which provides an idyllic backdrop for Shunchō's graceful figures. The location is not surprising; Edo was the artistic capital for *Ukiyo-e* printers. The background treatment is far more complex than Shunshō's, which consisted of a few lines. This more realistic, detailed background is another influence of Kiyonaga.

Shunchō's major accomplishment is visible in this print. He was the first to use only pale muted colors after the surge in popularity of the full color print in the late 1750s.<sup>2</sup> This added to the fragility and elegance of his figures. The change to a low-key palette made Shunchō's work stand out amid the rich, lavish colors used by the artists of the time. Otherwise, most of his work shows little deviation from that of his teachers, who preferred bright colors. For this reason, some believe it was his publisher who encouraged him to use



the subtler colors. Publishers were very influential in *Ukiyo-e* printmaking. They guided the artist in creating prints that would be commercially successful. One of the unique aspects of *Ukiyo-e* art is that it appealed to the general public.

Although the precise dates of Shunchō's birth and death are unknown, his work thrived in the 1780s and 1790s. As well as being a gifted artist, he was also a poet and essayist. When he retired from art, he dedicated himself to writing *kyōka* (humorous poetry), which was quite popular at the time.<sup>3</sup>

A.E.E.

<sup>1</sup>Munsterberg, *Japanese Prints*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 83.



**Kitagawa Utamaro** (1753-1806)

Title unknown

(*Frozen Dipper*)

1803-1804

Color woodblock print

19 3/8" x 7 1/4"

SBC# 1970.033

Gift of Ruth Woodhull Smith

Although Utamaro's first book was published in 1775, recognition of his work came in 1780 with two illustrated books. *Gifts of the Ebb Tide* contained delicate depictions of shells and other sea life. The second volume was the much acclaimed *Insect Book*, a beautifully printed catalogue of insects.

Utamaro is especially well known for his depictions of beautiful women. These include half-length figures on silver mica backgrounds and close-up portraits of large heads. In the artist's time, an elongated slenderness was considered the ideal form, and Utamaro's women are unusually tall with long and drooping clothes, and they appear relatively inactive. In the Sweet Briar print known as *Frozen Dipper*, the two women represented are typical of Utamaro's style. The composition in this piece is dominated by linear elements, characteristic of woodblock prints and Japanese art in general.

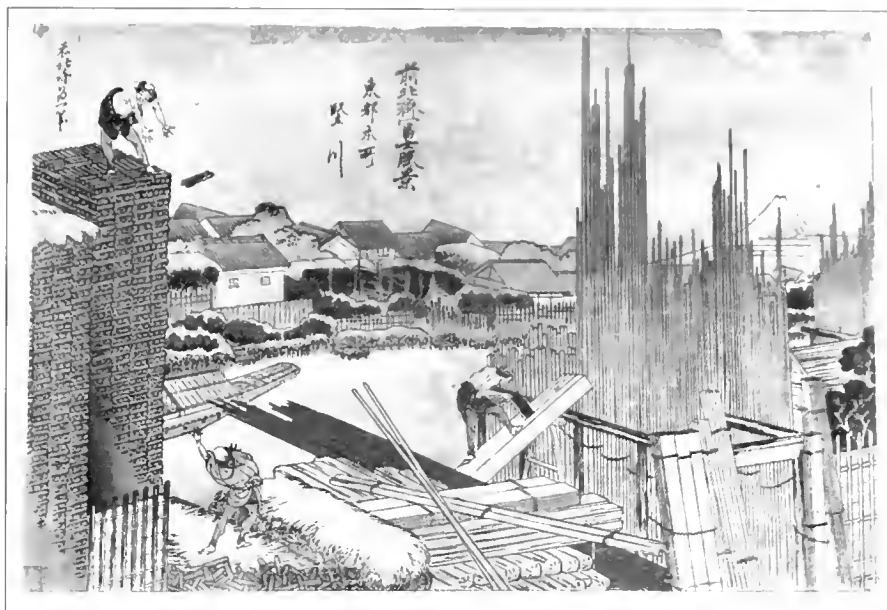
Most of Utamaro's source material came from within the walls of the Yoshiwara, the red-light district of Edo. Utamaro visited and studied the women and the activities in these houses. Their male clients showered the women with beautiful clothes and money and quite often competed for their affection. Consequently, these women, with their luxurious clothes and interesting daily routines, were the people that Utamaro enjoyed most.

But Utamaro's days were not all filled with laughter and gaiety like that of the Yoshiwara. Utamaro published a work depicting the pre-Tokugawa *shōgun*, Hideyoshi, entertaining five of his concubines. Utamaro was handcuffed and thrown into jail for thirty days because no one was allowed to publish anything representing an aristocrat or other high official. This prison sentence led to a broken spirit, two years of bad health and ultimately, his death in 1806.

*Frozen Dipper* is said to have been published around 1803-1804.<sup>1</sup> The picture represents an outdoor winter scene. The women are wearing many layers of clothing and they seem to be having trouble with the stone cistern that is covered with a layer of ice. Here, Utamaro applied mica to the print in order to create the illusion of frozen water reflecting the sunlight. Utamaro was influenced by Kiyonaga, whose contributions to the color woodblock print included the depiction of figures bathed in sunlight.

W.B.O.

<sup>1</sup> Hillier, *Utamaro*, p. 149.



Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

Tōto Honjo Tatekawa, Fugaku Sanjūrokkei

Tatekawa in Honjo, Edo, from the series, *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*

1822-1831

9 3/8" x 14 1/8"

SBC# 1970.010a

Gift of Ruth Woodhull Smith

*Tatekawa in Honjo* is a color woodblock print included in *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, a series of landscapes with figures. Many of the elements depicted are drawn from Hokusai's *Manga*, his 1816 sketchbook studies, and represent the culmination of years of obsessive study and work.<sup>1</sup> In this series, Hokusai combined his earlier attempts to use landscapes as a background in book illustrations and *surimono* (greeting cards) with the influence of the Chinese landscapes and realistic techniques of perspective and shading in Dutch copperplate prints.<sup>2</sup> The increased demand for genre prints in the early nineteenth century under the imposed peace of the Tokugawa shogunate was accompanied by a rise in the standard of living, with Hokusai's prints appealing to the new class of literate bourgeoisie. Hokusai's earlier *Ukiyo-e* prints of courtesans and *Kabuki* actors were later replaced with landscape subjects that reflected the pride of the common man and his everyday activities.<sup>3</sup> Other prints in *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji* portray the lives of fishermen, barrelmakers, *samurai* warriors, farmers, travelers, mountain climbers, Buddhist pilgrims, and woodcutters. Hokusai is considered one of the greatest *Ukiyo-e* artists, particularly of landscapes, and this series of views of Mt. Fuji is his most famous work.

Hokusai, who was the most prolific Japanese artist, produced more than 30,000 drawings, changed his name thirty-six times, and moved ninety-three times in his

ninety years. As was common among woodblock artists, Hokusai's name changed as he moved from master to master, studying the *Kabuki* prints of Shunshō, the art of brush painting of the Kanō school, the decorative designs of Korin, and the native Japanese style of the Tosa school.<sup>4</sup>

*Tatekawa in Honjo* is an excellent example of Hokusai's oeuvre. Honjo was a business district in Edo during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), and the Tatekawa was a small river that flowed into the Sumida. Many lumberyards were located along this river and Hokusai chose the Nishimura lumberyard for this woodblock design. The elaborate detail of this print, although a challenge for the woodblock cutter, does not create a crowded impression. The geometric forms, vertical lines, and angles of the lumber harmoniously tie the background to the foreground. At left, the workman is carelessly throwing wood chips up to his companion, who appears to be looking in the opposite direction. This figure is one of Hokusai's standard patterns and can be found in several other prints and in his *Manga* sketchbook.<sup>5</sup>

The inscription located in the top left, *Saki no Hokusai litsu*, or "litsu, the former Hokusai," dates this print after 1822, when Hokusai changed his name to litsu. *Tatekawa in Honjo* was completed before 1831, when *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji* was first advertised by Hokusai's publisher, Nishimuraya.<sup>6</sup>

R.P.B.

<sup>1</sup>Grilli and Kondo, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Terry, *Hokusai*, p. 12-13.

<sup>3</sup>Hillier, *Japanese Print*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>4</sup>Terry, *Hokusai*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 157.





Keisai Eisen (1790-1848)  
 Title unknown  
 (Geisha Tuning Shamisen)  
 Circa 1830-1842  
 Color woodblock print  
 14 3/4" x 9 7/8"  
 SBC# 1970.037

Keisai Eisen was active as an artist from 1810 to 1847 during the Edo period. He belonged to a school of artists led by Kikukawa Eizan (1787-1867), whose genre was mainly comprised of *bijinga*, prints of beautiful women. As a pupil of Eizan, Eisen was influenced by the Kanō and *Ukiyo-e* styles of painting. Before producing color prints, Eisen was a book illustrator. He authored *Mumei Ō Zuihitsu*, or *Essays of a Nameless Old Man*, which serves as a main reference book for our knowledge of the history of Japanese woodblock prints. Eisen's most celebrated achievement is the joint effort with Utagawa Hiroshige for the series of prints, *Sixty-Nine Stations on the Kiso*

*Highway*. The majority of the production of his artistic career, however, was that of the *bijinga* prints.

*Geisha Tuning Shamisen* is one of a series of *ōkubi-e*, or "large head pictures," of beautiful women done between 1830 and 1844. An inscription on the print identifies the subject as a fashionable *geisha*. The woman wears the courtly, stylish dress of her day. Her stark white face was a respected form of make-up, powdered in order to hide any blemishes. The exaggerated lips and hands are also typical of the *Ukiyo-e* prints of this era. This courtesan is tuning a *shamisen*, a Japanese three-stringed instrument similar to a banjo. The colors are primarily black, blue, green, and a light red. The use of these colors, the portrayal of the woman against a plain background, as well as some of the motifs and patterns in her clothing are repeated in many of Eisen's series of the *bijinga*, produced at the end of the Tokugawa regime.

M.M.F





**Keisai Eisen** (1790-1848)

*Fashionable Young Woman Playing Three Musical Pieces*

Circa 1840-1848

Color woodblock print

14 3/8" x 9 7/8"

SBC# 1970.035

Keisai Eisen is considered one of the most eccentric artists of his time. In the footsteps of his teacher Kikukawa Eizan, the majority of his artistic work was devoted to *bijinga*, prints of beautiful women, and to *shunga*, literally "spring pictures" or erotic prints. It is this type of work that mirrors the decadence of the end of the Tokugawa regime. The *bijinga* of Eisen and other nineteenth-century artists reflect a trend away from the refined and elegant women of the late eighteenth century and toward a gaudy, blatant realism, which shows women as vulgar and coquettish. Despite his wealthy upbringing, Eisen at one point superintended a brothel in the Nezu district of Edo. It may have been his im-

mense interest in depicting these coarse women that led him to favor this bohemian lifestyle.

The young woman in this *bijinga* print is an entertainer. She is playing the *koto*, a Japanese string instrument related in structure to the zither, which is placed horizontally on the floor. The woman sits behind the *koto* and plucks one of the thirteen strings with a pick. This instrument flourished in Japanese music from the seventeenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century when European music began to overshadow indigenous music in popularity.

The overdressed nature of the woman is a common element in Eisen's *bijinga*. This quality is further heightened by the excessive use of detail. The *origami* cranes, butterflies, flowers, and geometric shapes on the *kimono*, as well as the overly decorative headpiece, display this excessiveness.

H.A.G.W.



Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Ôtsu, Tōkaidō Gojusan Tsugi No Uchi

Ôtsu, Hashirii Teahouse, from the series, *Fifty-Three Stations on the Tōkaidō*

1834

Color woodblock print

8 7/8" x 13 3/4"

SBC# 1985.003c

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Henningsen, Jr.

Utagawa Hiroshige was born Tobutarō Andō in the vicinity of Edo. He first studied in 1811 with Toyohiro, an artist of the Utagawa school, and specialized in genre portraits of beautiful women and popular actors. A year later he studied Kanō art, a school that employed Chinese painting methods and strict, stylized and formal characteristics. He was also influenced by the style taught by Ōka Umphō, who encouraged a more personal approach to natural subjects. Western techniques of portraying perspective and naturalism had an important effect on his work. Hokusai, one of the great print masters, inspired Hiroshige the most with his landscape series, *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, published in 1822-1832. Hiroshige became interested in developing his own style in landscape prints. He created restful reflec-

tive scenes, whereas Hokusai's were dramatic.

Since 1615, Japan had been experiencing peace under the Tokugawa shogunate, a strict feudal hierarchy which encouraged the development of the arts. In 1832, Hiroshige had the freedom to travel without fear of warfare. *Fifty-Three Stations on the Tōkaidō* was captured in sketches made during this trip and, in 1833, his sketches were translated into woodblock prints. Hiroshige saw his native land with gentle warmth and a love for nature. He originally designed his landscapes to show the people of Edo the nature and beauty of Japan. With the limited transportation facilities of the day, they had little opportunity to see the country for themselves. So vivid are his prints that anyone who views them will feel that he is actually on the road. Ôtsu, the imperial seat in the second and seventh centuries, is situated on the southwest shore of Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan. In this print, Hiroshige captures an ordinary scene of a teahouse there with draymen waiting their turn at a well. *Fifty-Three Stations on the Tōkaidō* made Hiroshige one of the foremost landscapists in Ukiyo-e woodblock prints.

J.A.M.

Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)

*Nihonbashi, Yuki Bare, Meisho Edo Hyakkei*

*Nihonbashi, Clearing After Snow*, from the series, *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*  
1856

Color woodblock print

13 1/4" x 8 3/4"

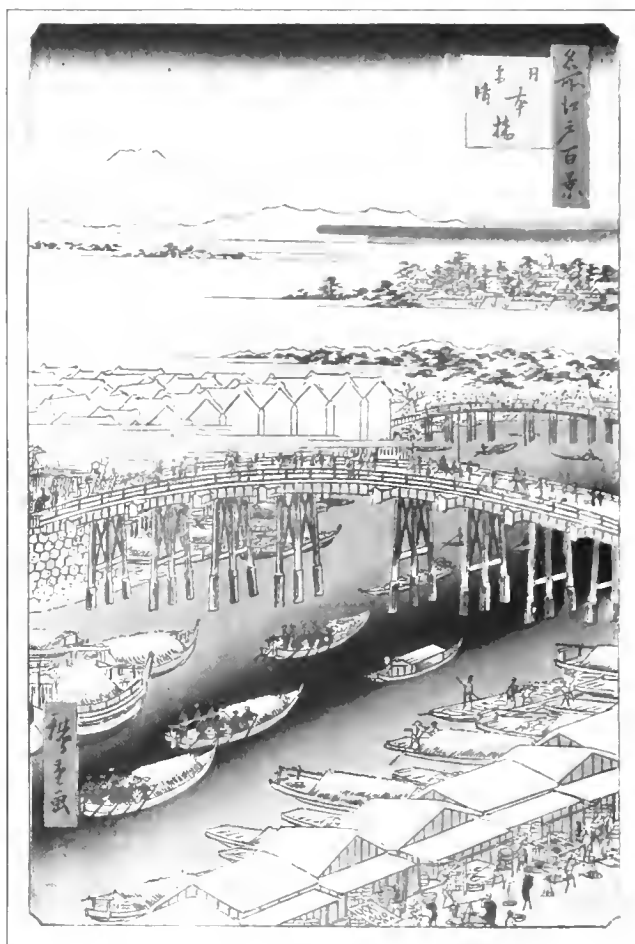
SBC# 1970.048n

Painted in the style of the Utagawa school, *Nihonbashi, Clearing After Snow* from the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, represents a typical *fukeya*, otherwise known as a *Ukiyo-e* landscape print. The development of this type of print was probably related to "a partial and often simulated observance of the sumptuary edicts of the shogunate: the enforcement of thrift and the official restrictions on entertainment."<sup>1</sup> These edicts motivated both woodblock print artists and the publishers of the works to use subjects outside the erotic and theater genres which had been so widely depicted. Because the shogunate also restricted travel, the market demand for travel prints grew even more and many different series were created.

This series, *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, was created by Utagawa Hiroshige and represents the starting point of the series in Edo, after a snowfall. While this is a particularly famous one, more important is the poetic association linked to the specific season.<sup>2</sup> The scene depicts a westward view of the Sumida river, the Bridge of Japan called the *Nihonbashi*, the Bridge of the Rising Sun, and Chiyoda Castle to the upper right. In the background, Mt. Fuji, the clouds, and the forest are much less naturalistically rendered than the detailed foreground of the Edo fishmarket and oar-powered fishing boats. *Bokashi*, a special technique of gradated shading, is used to create depth at the top of the sky, in the clouds, and in the river. Variations of the primary colors, red, blue, and yellow, are also used to create a strong contrast of forms.

All distances in Japan were measured by the *Nihonbashi*, the size of which has been exaggerated due to its importance. Also out of scale and incorrect in placement are fireproof storehouses on the left beyond the first bridge. These imprecise depictions are symbolic, "representing the power of the city of Edo to provide for its citizens."<sup>3</sup>

Although there are no censor seals or publisher's marks on the print, they would have originally been outside the printed image along the paper margin, which has since been removed.



H.A.G.W.

<sup>1</sup>Takahashi, *Traditional Woodblock Prints*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Smith and Poster, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Smith and Poster, p. 20.



**Utagawa Hiroshige** (1797-1858)

*Onagigawa Gohonmatsu, Meisho Edo Hyakkei*  
*Five Pines, Onagi Canal*, from the series, *One Hundred*  
*Famous Views of Edo*  
 1856-1864

Color woodblock print

13 3/8" x 8 3/4"

SBC# 1970.048g

Hiroshige was praised for his landscapes, which are the results of his impressions and studies of nature at various times of the year. The published set of prints which established Hiroshige as a master of landscapes in 1833 is *Tōkaidō Gojusan Tsugi*, or *Fifty-Three Stations on the Tōkaidō*.

*Five Pines* from the artist's series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* is an example of Hiroshige's landscapes in the *Ukiyo-e* style. It depicts an overhanging branch of the last surviving tree of five pines planted along the Onagi Canal.<sup>1</sup> The medium used, the

color woodblock print, became very popular as illustrations for books during the Edo period. This print exemplifies characteristics of the style in its use of two-dimensional space, design, decorative patterning, and clearly defined forms.

The river dominates half of the picture, but it does not seem to move back into deep space. The pine tree in the foreground looks as if it has been pasted onto the picture's surface instead of being incorporated into the landscape. A strong sense of design and decorative pattern is conveyed through the emphasis on vertical line in the braces supporting the limb of the huge old tree, the pilings along the river banks, and the fence along the road on the far shore. The forms in the composition are clearly defined by dark lines and color is simply added to fill in the outlines.

M.R.B.

<sup>1</sup>Smith and Poster, p. 97.



Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)  
*Asakusa Kinryuzan Sechu, Edo Meisho*  
*In the Snow Mountain, Asakusa Kinryuzan Temple*, from  
the series, *Famous Views of Edo*  
Circa 1839-1864  
Color woodblock print  
8 5/8" x 13 3/4"  
SBC# 1970.048a

Utagawa Hiroshige's first published works were the highly popular portraits of actors and beautiful women. He later devoted himself to landscapes, and his most famous work was the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. The Sweet Briar print *In the Snow Mountain, Asakusa Kinryuzan Temple* is from another series by Hiroshige, *Famous Views of Edo*. The Kinryuzan temple in the background seems to be raised above the city and at the eye level of the viewer.

Hiroshige was intrigued by the different times of year: the misty atmosphere of the rainy season, the summer showers, the fog moving into the city. In this print,

snowflakes drifting down through the quiet town and landing on the roofs suggests the texture of new-fallen snow. One of the artist's great strengths was his ability to adapt his painted design to the color print technique. His scenes are reduced to a few simple elements of highly decorative character. In this woodblock print, the trees are drawn with few lines, producing the effect of pen-and-ink technique.

Different shades of blue are used for the pond. The gradation of blue progressing from dark to lighter is called *bokashi*, the result of a special technique of inking the block. Varying degrees of gray in the sky blur and darken as they approach the upper edge of the image. Another characteristic detail seen in all of Hiroshige's pieces is the treatment of the faces of the figures, either hidden under a hat or umbrella or not quite distinguishable. This print is a good example of Hiroshige's techniques, atmosphere and simplicity.

K.B.G.



**Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)**

*Tamagawa-no-sato, Edo Meisho*

*Countryside by Tama River, from the series, Famous Views of Edo*

1858

Color woodblock print

8 1/2" x 13 3/8"

SBC# 1970.051

Utagawa Hiroshige is considered one of the greatest landscape masters of the Edo period. In presenting the "floating world" in many different ways, he brought new life to the *Ukiyo-e*. One of these ways was through his use of vivid colors. Also, as one can see at the top of the print *Countryside by the Tama River*, he used graduated color printing. The deep blue hue of the sky gradually lightens as it approaches the horizon. This technique is called *fuki-bokashi no saishiki-zuri*. Another method Hiroshige used was his presentation of illusion and the idea that the moment is short lived. Here he depicts people in the act of washing clothes. The format of this print is called *ōban yoko-e*, indicating a horizontal composition. The landscape, the backs of people bending over, and the clothes flowing in the water accentuate the horizontal axis. There is a sense of peace in this print. The Edo period was an era of peace, following a century of conflict in Japan.

Hiroshige helped bring new ideas and forms to art of the Edo period. He and his contemporaries fostered the

use of ordinary people and situations as subjects. Before the Edo period, these topics were not frequently used. Through his travels in his native land, he was able to show masterfully the beauty of Japan's countryside. He is adept at drawing the viewer into the print's surroundings. His works have influenced such Western artists as Whistler and Van Gogh, among others.

The artist began his career at a very young age. At fourteen, he entered the studio of Toyohiro, who was considered a docile and emotional man, much like Hiroshige himself. Only a year later, Hiroshige received his diploma, making him an official *Ukiyo-e* artist. Hiroshige was affected by many other influences: the Kanō school, southern Chinese-style painters (the *nanga* painters), and the realistic paintings of the Shijō school. He traveled widely and observed many different Japanese landscapes. He once accompanied a convoy taking a gift to the emperor from the *shōgun*. Mountains, rivers, and the coast were all part of a new inspiration for him. From direct observation of these landscapes, he made many sketches and the prints drawn from these were his greatest works. Hiroshige died at the age of sixty-two, when he was still a very active artist. He left behind him many pupils, but none of Hiroshige's successors were able to equal the quality or imagination captured in his landscape prints.

C.T.E.

**Toyokuni III**, formerly **Kochoro Kunisada** (1786-1865)  
*Full Moon in Autumn*  
 Circa 1850  
 Color woodblock print  
 14" x 9 3/4"  
 SBC# 1985.003d  
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Henningsen, Jr.

Toyokuni III is considered to be not only one of the most important artists of the late Edo period, but also one of the decadents of the Japanese print. He studied under the widely respected master, Toyokuni I (1769-1825), who, in turn, had studied under Ichiryūsai Toyoharu (1735-1814), the founder of the important Utagawa school. Toyoharu's depictions of women were handled with great technical mastery, a skill passed down through Toyokuni I to Toyokuni III.

Actor prints as well as *bijinga*, or depictions of beautiful women, were Toyokuni III's specialty. One aspect of his contributions to the decadence of the Japanese print with regard to the female subject is that he moderated the idealization of the female subject. His depictions were more realistic than those of the eighteenth-century masters, often including images of common women and courtesans who flaunted their sexuality more openly. While it is generally agreed that the artist's work saw a steady decline in quality as he aged, Toyokuni III was an artist of enormous commercial success. He is said to have created over 10,000 designs in his lifetime. His series *Selections of Actors, with Scenes of the Fifty-Three Stations on the Tōkaidō* was advertised with paper lanterns on poles outside of the publisher's shop, and the prints in this series were praised in a popular song.<sup>1</sup> However, his great popularity eventually led to overproduction of his prints and resulted in lowering their quality.

*Full Moon in Autumn* illustrates Toyokuni III's later handling of the female subject. The print depicts two women in an interior who are preparing to go to a *sohe* party, where they will provide entertainment by playing the *shamisen*. At this party, the inscription explains, the guests will admire the beauty of the full moon, which is loveliest in mid-autumn. By the time this print was created in 1850, the artist's style had become less refined and elegant. While the two women lack the elongated elegance of Toyokuni's earlier depictions of women, they are not "dwarfish and stoop-shouldered" as the critic Shoyo Tsubouchi described the artist's late prints of *bijinga*.<sup>2</sup> A certain lack of refinement is seen, however, in the treatment of the garments which are more angular and less curvilinear than in earlier prints, and outlined with harsh black lines. Designed fourteen years before the artist's death, *Full Moon in Autumn* is not only a charming but also instructive example of the decline in the quality of prints during the closing years of *Ukiyo-e*.

S.L.S.



<sup>1</sup>Takahashi, *Traditional Woodblock Prints*, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130.





**Toyokuni III**, formerly **Kochoro Kunisada** (1786-1865)  
*Shu-Getsu Musume Miyuki*  
*Autumn Moon: Young Girl Miyuki*  
 1857  
 Color woodblock print  
 14" x 9 1/2"  
 SBC# 1970.056  
 Gift of Ruth Woodhull Smith

Kunisada's print *Autumn Moon* reflects both his personal mature style as well as the popular trend in late *Ukiyo-e* color prints. Kunisada was the pupil of Toyokuni and eventually the head of the Utagawa school. He took the name Toyokuni in 1844, and was the third artist to use that name. His prints have become recognized as symbols of the *Ukiyo-e* period in the Western world because of the artist's tremendous output and popularity. This print reflects the current trend in the Ansei period (1854-1860) in the depiction of *bijinga*. Typical of the late *Ukiyo-e* period, the young girl Miyuki is shown as a sensual being dressed in ex-

pensive clothing; perhaps she is the daughter of a prosperous merchant. Her hunched shoulders and pronounced chin were characteristic of Kunisada's work at this time.

The colors and details of her clothing and the landscape, as well as the attention to the details of her toilette, are consistent with Kunisada's later work and reveal the influence of his master Toyokuni I. The inscription indicates that Kunisada created a composition of a beautiful, elegant woman of the nineteenth century appreciating the evening moon in the literary and artistic traditions of earlier periods. The fireflies buzzing around her add to the light of the full moon.

Although the quality and artistic merit of this print is not as high as some of Kunisada's earlier examples, it is representative of the late style of *Ukiyo-e* prints. It also serves as a good example of the type and caliber of Japanese prints which had become abundant in western Europe by that time.

J.A.E.



## CHŪSHINGURA

A series of events in Japanese history from 1701-1703 have come to be an integral part of the culture of the Japanese people. A story based on these events is celebrated as classically exemplifying loyalty, honor and the highest of *samurai* ideals. It has been portrayed through the years in art, song, puppet and *Kabuki* theater, and later in film and television drama.

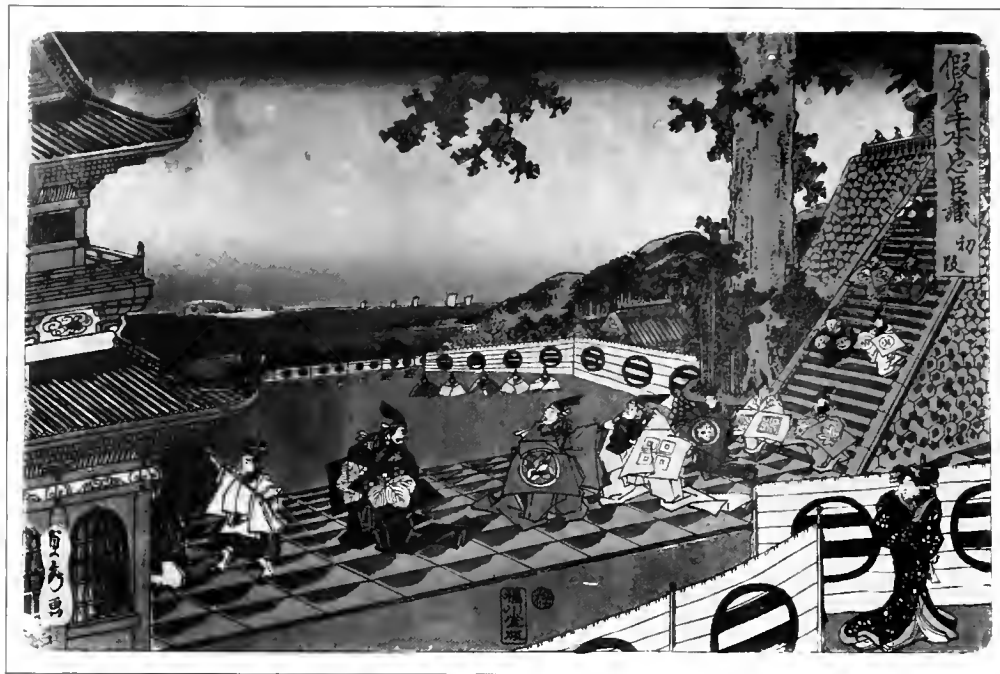
The essence of the story involves Lord Asano, a young baron from the rural province of Ako. A man of simple tastes and traditional values, he was among those summoned to the court in Edo to receive ambassadors from the emperor to the *shōgun*. The ways of the court were regarded as frivolous and decadent by Lord Asano, and he refused to pay the expected bribe to his instructor in court dress and etiquette, Lord Kira. Angered by Asano's refusal, Kira insulted him repeatedly and made insulting remarks about his wife. In a fit of frustration, Lord Asano drew his sword and struck Kira. Although the blow was not fatal, the act was punishable by death, and Lord Asano was ordered to commit *seppuku*, or suicide by disembowelment.

Forty-seven of Lord Asano's *samurai* retainers, now *ronin*<sup>1</sup>, swore to avenge their dead master. After waiting for the appropriate opportunity, they attacked Kira's living quarters, killed him, and marched with his head to the cemetery at Sengaku-ji where Lord Asano was buried and where they surrendered. Although they soon became folk heroes, their sentence was death by *seppuku*, which they regarded as an honorable resolution. The forty-seven *ronin* were buried beside Lord Asano, and their graves are a place of pilgrimage even today.

The most highly acclaimed play based on the story of the forty-seven *ronin*, of which there have been numerous variations, was written in 1748 and is entitled **Chūshingura**. The names of the characters and the settings of the events in the play were often taken from other eras to circumvent the government prohibition on the dramatization of matters of political interest. The character of Lord Kira, for example, is called Kono Musashinokami Morono, who was a powerful but unpopular *samurai* warrior from the fourteenth century. Lord Asano's character is called Enyahangan Takasada. The names of other characters were disguised and often had hidden meanings.

S.B.M.

<sup>1</sup>The term *ronin* refers to masterless *samurai* warriors. Hence, the story about this event is often referred to as "The Forty-Seven Ronin." In Japan, the forty-seven are called the *Ako Rōshi*. The term *roshi* is preferred because it connotes *ronin* with a special purpose or spirit.



Utagawa Sadahide (1807-1878/1879)

*Shodan, Kanadehon Chūshingura*<sup>1</sup>

*The Great Prelude*, from the series, *The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*

Circa 1842-1878/1879

Color woodblock print

8 3/4" x 13 3/4"

SBC# 1970.049a

Scenes from the *Chūshingura* were subjects for several *Ukiyo-e* artists. In the Sweet Briar collection, there are nine such prints by Utagawa Hiroshige and one by Sadahide. The subject of Sadahide's print is the first of three scenes in the Grand Prelude of the *Kabuki* theater production which takes place before the main part of the story begins.

The barons, dressed in fashionable and voluminous court attire displaying emblems of their families and led by Morono in black, are approaching the shrine of Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gu where an argument is taking place between Morono (Lord Kira) and Wakasanosuke. Enyahagan (Lord Asano) is immediately behind Morono and is followed by Wakasanosuke. The disagreement regards whether the helmet of a fallen warrior should be given a place of honor. Morono prophetically makes the point that the helmet is one of forty-seven and may not deserve special recognition. Wakasanosuke is provoked to the point of touching his sword, but he does not draw it.

Sadahide's print evidences the traditional flat Japanese style with no modeling or shading of forms as well as the use of Western techniques to create the perception of distance or depth. He achieves this perception by using converging lines and decreasing the size of the cir-

cular design on the cloth fence, and by decreasing the sizes of people and objects from the foreground to the background. By the placement of their feet and the flow of their costumes, Sadahide creates an impression of motion in the barons descending the stairs. The movement stops at center stage where the confrontation is occurring.

Sadahide, a member of the Utagawa school and a pupil of Kunisada, was one of the last generation of *Ukiyo-e* artists. He is better known as a Yokohama artist,<sup>2</sup> the term for those who used traditional *Ukiyo-e* woodblock techniques to depict the beginnings of modern Japan occurring in the port cities of Yokohama and Nagasaki. Sadahide has been called the most distinguished of the many artists active in producing the Yokohama prints which revealed the customs and fashions of Dutch, Americans, Russians, and other foreigners entering these ports.

In his lifetime, Sadahide produced and was recognized for an unusual variety of types of works: beautiful women, landscapes, theatrical prints, maps, and meticulously detailed, gigantic aerial views of Yokohama and Nagasaki. Following the showing of his work at the Paris International Exhibition in 1866, for which he received the French Legion of Honor, Sadahide became the leader in sales of prints, and was listed in 1868 as one of the most famous artists of the capital.<sup>3</sup>

S.B.M.

<sup>1</sup>Kanadehon refers to the penmanship copybook of *Kana*, the forty-seven symbols of the Japanese syllabary.

<sup>2</sup>Meech-Pekarik, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p.40.



Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858)

*Chūshingura Yauchi*

*Night Attack, Roshi Attacking Kira Kozukenosuke's House,*  
from the series, *Forty-Seven Roshi*

Circa 1845-1853

Color woodblock print

9" x 13 3/4"

SBC# 1970.049b

One of the last and greatest Japanese graphic artists of the *Ukiyo-e* tradition was Utagawa Hiroshige, who was most famous for his woodblock prints of landscape subjects. Hiroshige's color woodblock print, *Roshi Attacking Kira Kozukenosuke's House*, is not one of his more original subjects. During the late 1840s and 1850s, Hiroshige traveled around Japan seeking inspiration. While he waited for the right idea, he produced works that were less unusual. His *Chūshingura* series, completed between 1845-1853, was derived from the contemporary story of "The Forty-Seven Roshi" performed in the *Kabuki* theater and a common subject for many artists.

Its message shows the importance and presence of Japanese loyalty, honor and tradition. When Lord Asano's honor is violated, not only does he commit *seppuku*, suicide by disembowelment, to preserve his honor, but his followers seek to murder Kira, the man who verbally insulted and assaulted their leader. Here we see

the story as it comes to a close; the determined *roshi* march by night to attack Kira in a final act of loyalty, restoring and reaffirming Lord Asano's honor. The *roshi* in the center of the composition are in decorative warrior dress. Two frowning men thrust their paper lanterns toward the discovered Kira, who hides his face under his sleeve and backs into his hideout. While other men fend off Kira's followers, a *roshi* appropriately located in the center of the print blows a whistle signaling the discovery of the villain whom they have waited so long to punish. The drama, conflict, doom, and determination are sensed in the attackers' extended arms, Kira's flexed hand, the stiff stance of the warriors, and the terror and anger in their faces.

Powerful blacks and grays dominate the dramatic composition. Using Western perspective, Hiroshige gives a realistic representation of the setting. It is easy to see that it is nighttime with the paper lanterns, the full moon, and the contrasting dark sky. "The Forty-Seven Roshi," a commonly illustrated story, is a subject of only "mediocre inspiration"<sup>1</sup> by Hiroshige's unusual standards. However, in viewing the series, there is no doubt that Hiroshige was one of the most talented woodblock artists of his time.

S.K.M.

<sup>1</sup>Narazaki, pp. 31-33.



Utagawa Sadahide (1807-1878/1879)

*Ashikaga Takauji Minatogawa Shuppan no zu*  
*Fleet of Ashikaga Takauji Departing for Battle*  
 Circa 1825-1860

Color woodblock print

13 7/8" x 18 3/8"

SBC# 1979.003

Gift of Dr. Carol Rice

Utagawa Sadahide was an active artist in the late Edo and Meiji periods. In the early years of his career, he designed many battle scenes as well as landscape prints of the island of Kyushu. After the Edo period, Sadahide's prints focused on Western people and geography, such as the Shimbashi station, the terminal of the first railway line. He illustrated westernized Japan up to 1878/79, and then abruptly, there is no further evidence of his work.

The color woodblock print of the *Fleet of Ashikaga Takauji Departing for Battle* is a strong example of Sadahide's work before the Western influence. The print tells the story of the army of Ashikaga Takauji

(1305-1358) preparing for the historical battle on the Minatogawa River. Having already lost once in battle, Takauji retreated to the island of Kyushu. He then returned to Settsu to fight the army of Masashige Kusunoki. In 1336 Takauji defeats the troops of Nitta Yoshisada and Masashige Kusunoki at Minatogawa (now Kobe). Takauji kills Masashige in the battle of Minatogawa Kemmu Shikimoku. Ashikaga supports Emperor Kōmyō of the Jimyōin line living in Kyoto, which is now known as the Northern Dynasty. Emperor Godaigo of the Daikakuji line, claiming orthodoxy, moved his court to Yoshino in the Yamato province, which is also known as the Southern Dynasty. This movement is the beginning of the Northern and Southern courts.

The names of the soliders who belonged to Ashikaga's army appear as inscriptions within the design of the print. The names of the captains appear directly above each of their battleships. One of these is Morono, of *Chūshingura* fame.

S.L.C.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861)

Yodo Shoegei Kyogaku

Woman Teaching Child Calligraphy, from the series, *Instruction for Children in the Accomplishments*

Circa 1842

Color woodblock print

14 1/4" x 9 5/8"

SBC# 1970.002

Kuniyoshi was a member and student of the Utagawa school of Japanese painting headed by the artist Toyokuni. In 1815 he received his diploma from Toyokuni and took the professional name of Utagawa Kuniyoshi. He also studied traditional Japanese painting of the Tosa school, Chinese ink painting, and Western prints.<sup>1</sup> He was the son of a textile dealer in Kyoto and acquired an early love of painting. His constant exposure to the intricate and beautiful designs of his father's textiles led to a love of pattern that was to enhance his painting throughout his career.

This print is entitled *Woman Teaching Child Calligraphy* and comes from the series, *Instruction for Children in the Accomplishments*. At the top of the image is an open book. The text speaks of activities to do with the hand, and that the art of writing is among the most excellent. The box to the left of the woman holds the inks and brushes. The mother is leaning over the child preparing the inks to be used in the writing lesson. Beside the little boy is an open book from which he is diligently trying to copy. Instruction, which is the subject of this series of prints, is an important part of the relationship between Japanese women and children.

This series dates to the period of Kuniyoshi's mature style when he was at the peak of his popularity and was training his own students. Among them were his two daughters. By 1842, the suggested date of this print, Kuniyoshi is believed to have been a grandfather.<sup>2</sup> The humor and understanding with which he treats this subject may well reflect his feelings as a grandfather. His genial good nature and his flair for comedy are apparent in his treatment of the messiness of the little boy's first attempts at calligraphy. The overall whimsical mood of the print conveys much of the general atmosphere of pleasure that was pervasive in the "floating world" society of Japanese *Ukiyo-e* art. His love of design, developed in his father's business, is apparent in his attention to detail in the patterns of the woman's and child's clothing.

Kuniyoshi is perhaps best known for his prints of heroic subjects. Among them are the Empress Jingu and her fleet, Prince Yamato-Takeru-no-Mikoto and his grass-moving sword, and Tametomo shipwrecked by a great fish.<sup>3</sup> His output in other subjects was vast and varied, including landscapes, fan prints, birds, plants, comic subjects, book illustrations, the theater, and animals. His unique and individual style enabled him to portray them all successfully.



<sup>1</sup>Munsterberg, *Japanese Prints*, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup>Robinson, *Kuniyoshi*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>Robinson, *Kuniyoshi, The Warrior*  
*Prints*, pp. 14, 17, 19.



Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861)

*Shichi Fukijin*

*Beauty with a Letter/Jurojin with a Deer*, from the series,  
*Seven Women/Seven Lucky Gods*

1848

Color woodblock print

14 5/8" x 10 1/8"

SBC# 1985.003b

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Victor W. Henningsen, Jr.

Kuniyoshi was an outstanding artist of the Tokugawa period and is credited with having a versatile artistic background. He was a member of the Utagawa school and a pupil of Toyokuni. He continued his studies of traditional Japanese painting in the Tosa school and Chinese-style ink painting in the Kanō school. He also devoted much time to naturalistic styles of the Maruyama school as well as Western prints. Characteristics of all these schools are evident in Kuniyoshi's many works.

Most of Kuniyoshi's prints depicted battle scenes,

heroic warriors, and ghosts. However, in the print *Beauty with a Letter/Jurojin with a Deer*, Kuniyoshi exhibited a different style. This particular print is very symbolic. The many different objects depicted in this print are interrelated in meaning and reflect many elements of Japanese legend.

The beautiful woman, or *bijin*, is adorned in a very detailed and ornate *kimono* and is holding a scroll, which is symbolic of wisdom. In the bottom right hand corner of the print is a tri-colored cat, or a *mike-neko*, which is regarded as a good luck symbol. In the top right corner of the print is a hanging scroll with Jurojin, one of the seven gods of luck. Jurojin is the god of longevity and is usually depicted as a tall old man in the dress of a scholar.<sup>1</sup> At Jurojin's side and on the woman's *kimono* are deer, which signify longevity.

J.D.C.

<sup>1</sup>Joly, p. 548.



**Hiroshige II**, formerly **Ichiyūsai Shigenobu**  
 (1829-1869)  
*Kiyomizu-dera Kyo, Tōkaidō Meisho no Uchi*  
 Kyoto, from the series, *Famous Views of the Tōkaidō*  
 Circa 1858-1865  
 Color woodblock print  
 13 1/8" x 8 7/8"  
 SBC# 1970.046a

Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) became one of the most renowned and influential landscape painters and designers of prints during the Edo period. His ability to respond to the impressions he received from landscapes in different seasons enabled him to produce a wide variety of innovative prints. His reputation was widespread throughout Japan and Europe. After Hiroshige's death in 1858, his work was carried on by his primary successor Shigenobu. In 1862 Shigenobu married Hiroshige's daughter, Otatsu, and acquired the family name and title of Hiroshige II. The artist then began to paint numerous landscape prints that followed the first Hiroshige's style quite closely and was influenced by his master's sets of travelogue prints. Using this style, Hiroshige II produced notable sets of prints including *One Hundred Famous Views of the Provinces* (1859-1864), *Thirty-Six Views of Edo* (1859-1862), and *Famous Views of the Tōkaidō*. It is the latter series in which this print, *Kyoto*, is found.

Utagawa Hiroshige produced forty different sets of views of the Tōkaidō Highway, the route that carried traffic between the the *shōgun* in Edo and the emperor in Kyoto. Most noted was his series *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* (1833-1834), one of which, *Ōtsu*, may be seen in this exhibition. It was by this series that Hiroshige II was most influenced and which served as a source for his series of prints on the same topic. In the print *Kyoto*, Hiroshige II depicts *Kiyomizu-dera*, an important and famous temple built during the Edo period. The temple, situated on top of a high hill just outside the city of Kyoto, provided visitors with a view of the magnificent city.

Hiroshige II effectively uses linear perspective, which he learned from the first Hiroshige. The lines defining the architectural elements of the temple converge toward a vanishing point somewhere in the middle half of the picture. The temple falls back into space, and the rendering of the roof, stilts, and windows is well executed. Although the animate objects do not have the same sense of reality as the temple, they are placed in proper perspective according to the background and landscape. Similar to the handling of figures by Hiroshige I, the faces of the *samurai* are obstructed and only a few can be seen; those that can are not realistic but seem to be a caricature of the face. It was not Hiroshige II's intent to draw attention to the figures but perhaps toward their integration with the landscape and temple.

Hiroshige I was primarily interested in low horizons and atmospheric effects, and these elements can again be seen in Hiroshige II's *Kyoto*. Atmospheric clouds



frame the top and the bottom of the print to give the viewer the idea of looking in on this scene through the clouds.

In 1865, because of domestic troubles, Hiroshige II went to Yokohama, where he began to decorate and paint tea chests. Although the quality of *Ukiyo-e* prints generally deteriorated after Utagawa Hiroshige's death, his student Shigenobu was able to carry on the traditions his master had developed for at least seven more years. The works of these two artists are so similar that it is at times difficult to distinguish between the two with absolute certainty. Hiroshige II did not follow those who tended toward vulgar designs, erotic compositions, and garish colors, but instead concentrated on following in his master's footsteps.

C.S.



**Hiroshige II**, formerly **Ichiyūsai Shigenobu**  
(1829-1869)

*Onōhaikenasaban*

*One Noted Place of the Tōkaidō*

Active 1839-1864

Color woodblock print

12 7/8" x 8 1/2"

SBC# 1970.059a

This work is an excellent example of a *Ukiyo-e* woodblock print by Hiroshige II. The subject has been identified as a street dance or festival, however the actual occasion of celebration is unknown. Subjects most common in *Ukiyo-e* prints are genre scenes, landscapes, courtesans, actors, and life along the Tōkaidō road. In this particular print, we see the representation of young women looking out of windows onto a crowd of men dancing in the street below. One of the men carries a pole supporting a large banner which reads, "All the world is at peace." The presence of a scarecrow, held up by another figure in the crowd, might indicate a harvest dance or other celebration related to agriculture.

This is a good example of the artist's style because it shows the influence that his teacher Utagawa Hiroshige and other Japanese schools of art had on his work. The men are depicted in great detail, possibly showing the influence of the realistic techniques of the Shijō school. The variety of facial expressions add to the overall enthusiasm of the crowd. The elaborate rendering of the ornamentation on the house is also characteristic of the artist and the period. Hiroshige II has used the bridge as a device to create perspective. It successfully moves the viewer from the fore and middle grounds into the background.

The designers of *Ukiyo-e* prints transformed the woodblock print into a fine art form. The mass production of prints made them more accessible to the rising middle classes of Japan. Artists, like Hiroshige II, catered to the growing market. This piece is a beautiful example of the *Ukiyo-e* school as well as the Hiroshige II's personal style. It combines his desire to capture the essence of a moment with traditional *Ukiyo-e* subject matter.

L.S.V.



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Index to Artists in the exhibition:

	Page
Eisen, Keisai . . . . .	14, 15
Hiroshige, Utagawa . . . . .	16-20, 25
Hiroshige II (Ichiyūsai Shigenobu) . . . . .	29, 30
Hokusai, Katsushika . . . . .	13
Kunisada, Kochoro . . . . .	21, 22
Kuniyoshi, Utagawa . . . . .	27, 28
Sadahide, Utagawa . . . . .	24, 26
Shigenobu, Ichiyūsai . . . . .	29, 30
Shunchō, Katsukawa . . . . .	11
Toyokuni III (Kochoro Kunisada) . . . . .	21, 22
Toyonobu, Ishikawa . . . . .	10
Utamaro, Kitagawa . . . . .	12







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